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The Taliban: a study of book collections on the Taliban in academic, public and West Point libraries.

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TITLE: The Taliban: a study of book collections on the Taliban in academic, public and West Point libraries.

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Purpose: The purpose of this study was to document and compare the extent of book collections on the topic of the Taliban in selected academic libraries in New York and New Jersey, the New York Public Library and the military academy at West Point.

Design/methodology/approach: Books on the Taliban were chosen as an index of the Afghanistan war since the Taliban are the major defining element of the Afghanistan war. WorldCat was searched (www.worldcat.org) using the following criteria: 'kw: taliban' > 'English' > 'Non-Fiction' > 'Non-Juvenile' = 1,668 titles.

Duplicates were eliminated as were theses, government publications, ephemera and other items. Closely related titles were amalgamated. Only works that had Taliban in the title or subtitle were chosen from the cumulative groups above resulting in a total of 83 titles.

Findings: Only two libraries crossed 50% of the "core" collection of 83 titles. Twenty seven percent of the 83 titles (n=22) were not held by any library and only seven books were in all libraries. New York Public Library topped the modest rankings and scored above the academic libraries and West Point. West Point ranked last by a big margin (29 points).

New York Public Library scored better than all the academic libraries with 49% of the 83 titles, followed closely by Columbia University with 46%. There was an 8 point drop to 38% for New York University which modestly outpointed the 35% for Princeton.

Research limitations/implications: The possible research limitation lies in that the degree of library holdings may not reflect the low level of engagement by the public, academia and military in the ongoing wars.

Social implications: May indicate low priority by collection development librarians in public libraries and in the libraries of academic and military colleges to develop a comprehensive collection of material on the Afghanistan and Iraq wars.

The paper argues that more extensive collections should be built despite the media and the general population's antipathy to the war.

A comprehensive collection for students, scholars, the public and the next generation of officers about a contemporary war which has profound financial, political and military sequelae should be a priority for collection building librarians.

Originality/value: The low holdings of books on the Taliban and hence the war in Afghanistan in libraries of academic, public and West Point may reflect the low level of interest of the US population wars in Afghanistan Iraq (and Libya).

Paper type: Research paper

KEYWORDS: Taliban, Afghanistan, Academic Libraries, Public Libraries, West Point.

INTRODUCTION

From Oct 2001 to date (Mar 20th 2011) US troop fatalities were 1,505 in Afghanistan and 4,440 in Iraq, with injury rates close to nine times the death rate (www.icasualties.org). Non-fatal injuries can be catastrophic from a combination of devastating ordinance and higher survivability rate due to rapid medical battle field intervention. This results in longer and more costly recuperation and higher disability payments which funnel into the estimated three trillion dollar cost of the war of the war.¹

A study by Stanford University and the Naval Postgraduate School indicates that post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among Iraq veterans could be as high as 35%.² Concussive brain injury from repeated exposure to multiple roadside bombs causes functional deficits that are often hard to diagnose and treat. These two brain assaults: one physical and one mental cause major social and societal fallout.

Despite the enormous financial and human cost just 4% of the US public put the war/fear of war as their top concern.³ This could be because news coverage is scant in the print and other media. In Oct 2010 the new edition of the online game "Medal of Honor" allowed players to be Taliban and "kill" US troops which reflects the general disconnect of the wider population from the war.

I wanted to see if this disconnect was reflected in our libraries as well. Or would our libraries reflect the severity of the human and economic cost of the war by taking the lead and building a comprehensive collection of books on the war that would provide their respective constituencies with the tools for research and reflection. I examined the book holdings on the Taliban (as an index term of the wider war) in public and private colleges in New York and New Jersey, in New York Public Library, the Brooklyn Public Library and the United States Military Academy at West Point.

METHODOLOGY:

Books on the Taliban were chosen as an index of the Afghanistan war since the Taliban are the major defining element of the Afghanistan war. WorldCat was searched (www.worldcat.org) using the following criteria: Taliban as keyword, then restricted to English language, physical book material, no fiction and no juvenile works.

'kw: taliban' > 'English' > 'Non-Fiction' > 'Non-Juvenile' = 1,668 titles

Three major subgroups were identified within this set viz.

'kw: taliban' > 'English' > 'Non-Fiction' > 'Non-Juvenile' > 'History & Auxiliary Sciences' = 355

'kw: taliban' > 'English' > 'Non-Fiction' > 'Non-Juvenile' > 'Sociology' = 171

'kw: taliban' > 'English' > 'Non-Fiction' > 'Non-Juvenile' > 'Political Science' = 77

Duplicates were eliminated as were theses, government publications, ephemera and other items. Closely related titles were amalgamated. Only printed books were considered. Only works that had Taliban in the title or subtitle were chosen from the cumulative groups above resulting in a total of 83 titles.

This was done to provide reasonable numbers to analyze, but it also insured that every title had Taliban as a keyword as well as in the title. The presence of a word in the title of a book does not guarantee the book will reflect the topic in a cogent or scholarly manner the three non-fiction subject categories provided some confidence that the books would be close to target. The methodology was regarded as safe and reasonable as evidence in the discussion section will verify. Samples of excluded titles see Appendix 1.

Data for title, author, publisher, pagination and number of libraries in WorldCat were recorded on an Excel file for the libraries below. Internal counter keys were used to help with summations. The data is available from the author.

The holdings of the 83 titles in the libraries were determined from WorldCat. The individual library catalogs were not searched. Any errors from this method were assumed to be evenly distributed across the libraries. No study of the consistency of WorldCat holdings versus local catalogs has been published to date in the literature.

- City University of New York (CUNY) (largest urban university in the US)
- Columbia University (COL) (private university)
- New York University (NYU) (private university)
- Princeton University (PRI) (New Jersey) (private university)
- Rutgers University (RUT) (New Jersey) (state university (public))
- New York Public Library (NYPL)

- Brooklyn Public Library (BPL)
- US Military Academy at West Point (USMA)

FINDINGS:

Only NYPL and Columbia had over 50% of the 83 titles. Twenty seven percent of the 83 titles (n=22) were not held by any library and just seven books were in all eight libraries.

New York Public Library scored better than all the academic libraries with 49% of the 83 titles, followed closely by Columbia University with 46%. There was an 8 point drop to 38% for New York University which modestly outpointed the 35% for Princeton.

Close behind were the two public universities: 33% for the City University of New York and 31% for Rutgers. Brooklyn Public Library was seven points behind the next at 24% and West Point ranked last with 20% of the 83 titles in their collection 29 percentage points adrift of NYPL.

To summarize: NYPL > COL > NYU > PRIN > CUNY > RUT >> BPL > USMA.

Although Columbia and Princeton rank second and fourth in the 2011 *US News & World Report*, NYPL outdid both of them (as well all the other academic libraries).

The rankings were unreliable indicators based on the libraries investigated here for instance NYU (33) scored higher than Princeton (2) and Rutgers (29). A follow up study analyzing holdings for the top 30 ranked colleges is in progress.

Table 1: Number of books (N=83) with Taliban in keyword and title

n=83	NYPL	COL	NYU	PRIN	CUNY	RUT	BPL	USMA
YES	45	42	34	29	27	26	20	17
%	54	51	41	35	33	31	24	20
Rank	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

USN&WR	N/A	2	33	4	N/R	29	N/A	N/R
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Figure 1: Number of books (n=83) with Taliban in keyword and title

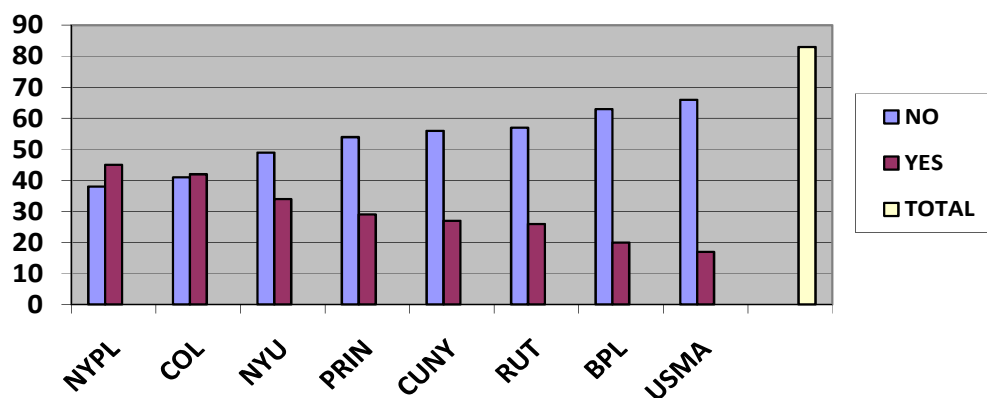


TABLE 2: Number of books (n=83) with Taliban in keyword and title.

	NYPL	COL	NYU	PRIN	CUNY	RUT	BPL	USMA
NO	38	41	49	54	56	57	63	66
YES	45	42	34	29	27	26	20	17
TOTAL	83	83	83	83	83	83	83	83
% NO	46	49	59	65	67	69	76	80
% YES	54	51	41	35	33	31	24	20
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

In case the selection criteria of Taliban as keyword plus Taliban in the title were prone to unintentional errors by excluding valid titles, various searches were run to boost the reliability of the choice.

The sequence of holdings were identical for both the search of Taliban as keyword or Taliban in the title (English language, books including ebooks, all types of documents, not juvenile, not fiction). CUNY was excluded because there was no realistic way to check holdings without checking 13 individual college holdings and then eliminating duplicates.

The ranking sequence for the other libraries closely parallels that found in the current study (Table 3). Although this study revealed tepid holdings for print books, the holdings are dramatically worse when all book formats are included and theses and government documents are included (not possible to exclude these from the WorldCat version available at CUNY which allows one the advantage of using the advanced search option to limit by WorldCat library).

Table 3: Rankings for libraries with Taliban in Keyword, Title and this study

LIBRARY	NYU	COL	NYPL	BPL	USMA	RUT	PRIN
WC CODE	ZYU	ZCU	NYP	BKL	YWM	NJR	PUL
TALIBAN KW	228	270	258	164	161	189	242
RANK	4	1	2	6	7	5	3
HOLDINGS	10%	12%	11%	7%	7%	8%	10%
TALIBAN TI	63	83	79	47	39	58	70
RANK	4	1	2	6	7	5	3
HOLDINGS	9%	12%	11%	7%	5%	8%	10%
TALIBAN KW + TI	34	42	45	20	17	26	29
RANK	3	2	1	6	7	5	4
HOLDINGS	41%	51%	54%	24%	20%	31%	35%

CONCLUSION

Holdings on the Taliban are modest in all the libraries in this study. All of the libraries can do more. Academic libraries in particular need to build collections for research to retain their relevance as academically viable entities. The number of

titles in the West Point Library should be the highest rather the lowest. It seems reasonable that every publication on the Taliban should be in the collection of military academy library.

Many of the books not held by the libraries are published outside the US and may not be as easy to buy as main stream titles published in the US and available through Coutts and other vendors. But the inertia in acquiring such material is outweighed by the importance of having the most extensive collection possible on this critical contemporary crisis.

A follow up study is underway to examine holdings in the two remaining Armed Forces Academy libraries since it seems critical that these three institutions at least would have adequate coverage of the Taliban.

APPENDIX 1

Examples of titles excluded from count of 83 books.

The campaign against international terrorism: prospects after the fall of the Taliban.

Paul Bowers; Tim Youngs; Mark Oakes; Great Britain, House of Commons Library, p. 65 [Reprint from the House of Commons website]

The Taliban's winning strategy in Afghanistan. Gilles Dorronsoro. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 32 p. : ill., maps ; 26 cm. [Full txt PDF available free on the web]

The future of Afghanistan : the Taliban, regional security and U.S. foreign policy. John T Crist; United States Institute of Peace. 15 p. ; 28 cm. [Summary of conference]

Pakistan's Taliban crisis : savaging or salvaging the state? by Rajshree Jetly; National University of Singapore. Institute of South Asian Studies 5 p. [ISAS brief paper]

APPENDIX 2

The seven books with Taliban in title in all eight libraries sorted by number of libraries listed on Worldcat

Title	Author	Publisher	Year	Worldcat
Taliban : the power of militant Islam in Afghanistan and beyond	Ahmed Rashid	I. B. Tauris	2010	2859
My forbidden face : growing up under the Taliban : a young woman's story	Latifa; Chékéba Hachemi	Hyperion	2001	1693
Afghanistan : a military history from Alexander the Great to the fall of the Taliban	Stephen Tanner	Da Capo Press	2002	1629
Reaping the whirlwind : the Taliban movement in Afghanistan	Michael Griffin	Pluto Press	2001	1538
Afghanistan's endless war : state failure, regional politics, and the rise of the Taliban	Larry P Goodson	University of Washington Press	2001	1515
The Taliban : war, religion and the new order in Afghanistan	Peter Marsden	St. Martin's Press	2002	1143
The punishment of virtue : inside Afghanistan after the Taliban	Sarah Chayes	Penguin Press	2006	104

¹ The Three Trillion Dollar War: The True Cost of the Iraq Conflict, Joseph Stiglitz, Linda Bilmes, Publisher: Allen Lane

² A Dynamic Model for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Among U.S. Troops in Operation Iraqi Freedom, Michael P. Atkinson, Adam Guetz, Lawrence M. Wein. *Management Science*.2009; 55: 1454-1468

³ Gallup Poll June 11-13th 2010.